

Gábor Takács-Nagy conducts the Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Friday, September 28, 2018 at 8:00pm

Prelude Recital at 6:45pm

Pre-concert Talk at 7:15pm

This is the 861st concert in Koerner Hall

Gábor Takács-Nagy, conductor

Orin Laursen, violin

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Overture to *La clemenza di Tito*, K. 621

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 35

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Canzonetta: Andante
- III. Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

INTERMISSION

Antonín Dvořák: Symphony No. 8 in G Major, op. 88, B.163

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto grazioso
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born in Salzburg, Austria, January 27, 1756; died in Vienna, Austria, December 5, 1791

Overture to *La clemenza di Tito*, K. 621 (1791)

In July 1791, Mozart was busy writing both *The Magic Flute* and the Requiem – and, presumably, spending a little quality time with the recently born sixth addition to the Mozart household. Around the middle of the month, he received a visit from the Impresario of the Italian Opera in Prague wanting to commission a new opera to celebrate the forthcoming coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia. Salieri had turned him down; Mozart was his second choice. The opera was to be in the apparently old-fashioned formulaic opera seria form, designed, some might say, as a prop to a dynastic society. Mozart saw potential in the 57-year-old libretto by Metastasio, had it brought up to date, and set to work writing an opera that had to be completed in six weeks, and the parts copied, rehearsed, and staged within a further nine days. With the ability to say in a handful of bars what many of his contemporaries would take several pages to say, Mozart's *Clemenza* transcends the opera seria stereotypes and encapsulates the humane ideals of the Enlightenment. Its overture, inevitably written at the last minute, once Mozart had arrived in Prague with his pupil and assistant Süssmayr to help get the opera to stage, shows nothing of the haste in which it was written. In the mature Mozart's grandest C major celebratory vein, with ceremonial trumpets and drums adding to the splendour, the overture contains a more than usually substantial development. The order of its two themes are reversed in the reprise.

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, April 25/May 7, 1840; died in St. Petersburg, Russia, October 25/November 6, 1893

Violin Concerto in D Major, op. 35 (1878)

"Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto gives us for the first time the hideous notion that there can be music whose stink one can hear," snarled Eduard Hanslick, Vienna's leading music critic, in quite the nastiest review of a new work one can imagine (December 5, 1881, *Neue Freie Presse*). Tchaikovsky could quote it by heart for the rest of his life. Hanslick's olfactories had breathed sweeter air when Brahms introduced his Violin Concerto to the same city, then the home town of both men, a year earlier. Now a rival composer from Russia was accused of introducing the smell of vodka into the finale of his new concerto and Vienna was generally not impressed.

Tchaikovsky had written the concerto spontaneously for Yosif Kotek, a young violinist friend and former pupil who was infatuated with his teacher. The two men had been spending time together in Clarens, Switzerland, helping Tchaikovsky recover from an ill-conceived marriage to the unfortunate Antonina Milyukova. They played through many works for violin and piano, especially enjoying the *Symphonie espagnole* by Lalo, which had been recently published. "Lalo," Tchaikovsky wrote, "thinks more about musical beauty than about observing established traditions, as do the Germans." In this open frame of mind, in March 1877, Tchaikovsky put aside other work and, in just 11 days, completed a new concerto for the young Russian violinist, finishing the orchestration two weeks later.

After playing through the piece with Kotek, Tchaikovsky substituted a Canzonetta for the original slow movement. A simple, lyrical movement, it reveals the composer's deeply ingrained Russianness. Adolf Brodsky eventually gave the poorly received Vienna premiere, with Hans Richter conducting. A performance in Moscow several months later went much better and, after a shaky start, the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto was soon on its way towards becoming one of the great concertos in the repertoire. Throughout, the violin is allowed to focus on the more lyrical melodies, rather than go to combat with the orchestra, and the weight of the powerful climaxes is generally carried by the orchestra

Antonín Dvořák

Born in Nelahozeves, Bohemia, September 8, 1841; died in Prague, Czech Republic, May 1, 1904

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, op. 88, B.163 (1889)

The most nationalistic and Czech of Dvořák's symphonies, the G Major Symphony nevertheless managed to acquire the nickname the 'English' for years following its publication by an English publisher. Dvořák conducted the premiere in Prague and took the new symphony to England when the University of Cambridge awarded him an honorary doctorate in June 1891. "All faces were serious and it seemed to me as if no one knew any other language but Latin," Dvořák said of the ceremony. An impressive audience of 8,000 proved considerably more animated two years later, when Dvořák conducted the symphony at the Chicago World's Fair. Its reception was second only to that of the premiere of his *New World Symphony* in New York, four months later.

Like Schubert, Dvořák has the knack of making his music sound natural. His abundant melodies are grounded in the Bohemian countryside that he loved and where he wrote the G Major Symphony. His writing has a spontaneous, open-air feel and generally avoids sounding contrived or academic. In the Eighth Symphony, Dvořák creates a highly original structure, in the perfect combination of form and content. He referred to it as "different from other symphonies, with individual thoughts worked out in a new way." He forges a close interconnection between the melodies of all four movements, both underpinning the work and making the exuberant Bohemian dance of the finale all the more effective. The opening sonorous, hymn-like phrase for cellos, clarinets, bassoons, and horns immediately stands out as a minor key opening to a major key symphony. But it also generates the flood of melodies to come, all of them memorable, all contributing to the forward surge of the music. "Melodies simply pour out of me," Dvořák said at the time.

Dark minor-key clouds hang over the outer sections of the slow movement, punctuated by stillness and silences, revealing an otherwise tranquil country scene. An heroic C major central interlude gives the composer an opportunity to work in memories of his student days when he played under Wagner, a composer he respected. The G minor scherzo opens as a forlorn country-dance, compellingly beautiful in its melancholy, comforted by a warmer, major-key trio section. A trumpet fanfare introduces the finale, which frequently looks forward to Mahler, who both admired and conducted Dvořák's symphonies. In it, Dvořák writes some of his most profoundly Czech music, meditating long and lovingly on the theme before the trumpet fanfare returns in a blaze of glory.

- Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner

Gábor Takács-Nagy

Conductor

Born in Budapest, Gábor Takács-Nagy began studying the violin at the age of eight. As a student of the Franz Liszt Academy, he won First Prize in 1979 in the Jenő Hubay Violin Competition and later pursued studies with Nathan Milstein.

From 1975 to 1992, he was founding member and leader of the acclaimed Takács Quartet. In 1996, he founded the Takács Piano Trio and made world premiere recordings of Hungarian composers such as Franz Liszt, László Lajtha, and Sándor Veress. Gábor Takács-Nagy is considered one of today's most authentic exponents of Hungarian music and, in particular, that of Béla Bartók. In March 2017, he was awarded the prestigious Béla Bartók-Ditta Pásztor Prize.

In 1998, he established the Mikrokosmos string quartet with compatriots Zoltán Tuska, Sándor Papp, and Miklós Perényi but, in 2002, he turned to conducting and was named Music Director of the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra in 2007 and Music Director of Manchester Camerata in 2011.

He is regularly invited to conduct the Orchestre National de Lyon, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, the Orchestra Filarmonica di Bologna, l'Orchestre de l'Opéra de Toulon, the Malaysian Philharmonic, the Calgary Philharmonic, the Orchestra of Dijon-Bourgogne, the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, amongst others.

Gábor Takács-Nagy is also a highly sought-after chamber-music teacher. He is Professor of String Quartet at the Haute Ecole de Musique in Geneva. In 2012, he was awarded honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Orin Laursen

Violin

Violinist Orin Laursen is an active performer of both chamber music and the solo violin repertoire who presents works from the Baroque to the contemporary era with equal passion and imagination.

On the concert stage he has collaborated with artists such as Robert McDonald, Paula Robison, Richard Lester, William Purvis, Misha Amory, Andrés Díaz, Steven Dann, Hsin-Yun Huang, Barry Shiffman, Michael Kannen, Nicholas Cords, Maria Lambros, Ara Gregorian, and the Borromeo String Quartet. He has appeared as a soloist with the Saint Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, the Durham Symphony, the Winston-Salem Symphony, and the Tar River Orchestra.

A strong advocate of contemporary music, Mr. Laursen has worked with such eminent composers as Christian Wolff, Unsuk Chin, Harrison Birtwistle, and John Zorn, and extensively with prominent Canadian composer Kati Agócs. His recent appearances have included performances with the Callithumpian Consort on the Music at the Gardiner series and at Jordan Hall, and a showcase in Jordan Hall for acclaimed composers Pozzi Escot and Robert Cogan.

Originally from Durham, North Carolina, Mr. Laursen earned his Master of Music and Graduate Diploma at the New England Conservatory with violinists Soovin Kim and Nicholas Kitchen, and his bachelor's degree at the Peabody Conservatory under violinist and pedagogue Victor Danchenko. His previous mentors include Joseph Genualdi and José Bastardes. Currently, he is pursuing his Artist Diploma at The Glenn Gould School with Paul Kantor and Barry Shiffman and is the recipient of the full-tuition Neville & Vivienne Poy Scholarship. He plays a violin made in 2014 by Joseph Curtin.

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Joaquín Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. Through the RBC Guest Conductor Program, four renowned conductors work with the RCO each season, allowing GGS students to gain experience through professional rehearsal and performance conditions. The week culminates in a Koerner Hall performance under the batons of such distinguished guest conductors as Johannes Debus, András Keller, Gábor Takács-Nagy, and Bramwell Tovey, who lead the RCO this season. Past guest conductors have included Ichnatowycz Chair in Piano

Leon Fleisher, Sir Roger Norrington, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Nathan Brock, Julian Kuerti, Uri Mayer, Tania Miller, Tito Muñoz, Peter Oundjian, Ivars Taurins, and Lior Shambadal. The RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Bachelor of Music and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, winners of The Glenn Gould School Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, Tafelmusik, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. The RCO has been heard repeatedly on the national broadcasts of the *CBC Radio*, has been invited to perform at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston, and toured China during the 2004-05 season.